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ABSTRACT

This report describes a "culturally contexted" conversation analysis approach to the study of naturally occurring speech in supervisory conferences. The supervisors and teachers were participants in a graduate program for beginning teachers, and the conference's purpose was supervisory evaluation of teachers' classroom performances. Ethnographic techniques and conversational analysis involved taped recordings and descriptive accounts of six teacher/supervisor conferences, followed by transcriptions and taped debriefing sessions with the supervisors. Conversation analysis showed how discourse and interaction patterns mitigate criticism and demonstrate the conference expectation of supervisory evaluation, the supervisory freedom to use teacher "data" and control the sequences and topics of talk, and the "embedded" nature of the conferences. (36 notes) (LMI)

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SUPERVISORS' TALK: CONVERSATION ANALYSIS AND ETHNOGRAPHY OF SUPERVISORY CONFERENCES

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INTRODUCTION

The supervisory conference has a special role within the field of instructional supervision. Granted that instructional supervision represents only one domain of supervisors' activities,[1] it is not difficult to understand the enduring emphasis face-to-face encounters between teacher and supervisor have received in the research literature.[2]

What is difficult to understand, however, is that efforts to make sense of such interactions have relied almost entirely upon coding schemes and categorizations of supervisor-teacher talk--as opposed to allowing that talk to speak for itself. The paradigm shift in education toward naturalistic inquiry has only just begun to influence studies in supervision.[3]

Other fields of inquiry have long since employed naturalistic or ethnographic methods. The disciplines of anthropology, sociology, and linguistics have been in the vanguard of research that has been concerned with understanding

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[1]See Peter F. Oliva, Supervision for Today's Schools, 3rd ed. (New York: Longman, 1989); Edward Pajak, The Central Office Supervisor of Curriculum and Instruction: Setting the Stage for Success (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1989); and Edward Pajak, "Dimensions of Supervision," Educational Leadership 48 (No. 1, September 1990): 78-81.

[2]For example: Arthur Blumberg," Supervisor-Teacher Relationships: A Look at the Supervisory Conference," Administrator's Notebook 19 (No. 1, September 1970): 1-4; and Edward Pajak and John T. Seyfarth, "Authentic Supervision Reconciles the Irreconcilables," Educational Leadership 40 (No. 8, May 1983): 20-23.

[3]Egon Guba, "Introducing 'Qualitative' Research: Concepts and Issues" (Presession of The Qualitative Research in Education Annual Conference, Athens, Georgia, January 1991).

the "object of study" from the participant's perspective. Advances in the fields of anthropological linguistics and socio-linguistics, as examples, have contributed to our understanding of the nature of language, and the role contexts play in members' activities.

Recently, Michael Moerman, an anthropologist and conversation analyst, proposed an approach he termed "culturally contexted conversation analysis" as a means to bridge the gap between anthropology and linguistics.[4] He claimed that:

> All meaning is in relation to a context. Explicating the meanings requires stating the context. Every context is multi-layered: conversation-sequential, linguistic, embedded in the present scene, encrusted with past meanings, and more. I do not believe that the ingredients of meaning can be listed, and am certain that they cannot be listed in advance.[5]

In this same spirit, that is, in an attempt to understand what supervisors were up to (or thought they were up to) when in conference, I undertook the research project of which this report is part. In an effort to capture and then make sense of naturally occurring speech in supervisory conferences, I did not enter the field with pre-organized coding schemes. Instead, I employed a tape recorder, a pen and a notepad. I recorded six conferences between supervisors and teachers in their totality and wrote a descriptive account of the scene as it appeared to me at the time it occurred. Transcription of the conference tapes

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[4]Michael Moerman, Talking Culture: Ethnography and Conversation Analysis (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), p. 5.

[5]Ibid., p. 7.

was done after all conferences were recorded. These conferences were transcribed according to conversation analysis protocol (see Appendix).

After each conference, I engaged the supervisor in a debriefing session. These sessions were also recorded on audio tape and transcribed, although not in a conversation analytic style.

This combined use of ethnographic techniques and conversation analysis, I hoped, would yield something akin to Moerman's culturally contexted conversation analysis. I was, as I saw it, "casting a wide net."

The following, then, represents the understandings I have come to have of supervision and the supervisory conference as I witnessed it being enacted by these three supervisors and their five teachers.[6]

RESEARCH CONTEXT AND PARTICIPANTS

The supervisors and teachers in this study were participants in a graduate program for beginning teachers sponsored by a college of education in the northwestern United States. The

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[6]Though my intention had been to present the participants' perspectives of supervision and supervisory conferences, I have come to realize through the continuing analytical process that the understandings I have achieved are mine, and not necessarily those of the teachers and supervisors. I do believe that I can make a strong case for the participants' orientation; still, there remains an amount of uncertainty and so I offer this caveat. I do wish to thank the supervisors and teachers who took part in this study for their time and patience. I also wish to thank Jack Whalen for his help with the transcription and early analysis.

program was modeled after the Harvard master of arts in teaching summer school program.[7]

Teachers admitted to the program attended summer courses on the university campus. They then left for their assigned districts, where they had probationary contracts for that year. For two weeks before the start of their public school classes, these teachers met daily with their district supervisor to receive instruction designed to help them with the start of school.

These supervisors, three in number, held central office appointments and, besides their other duties, were charged with supervising five or six teachers each. The understanding was that the supervisors would make weekly visits to the teachers' classrooms and also conduct weekly seminars for them, generally held at their central office after school.

Though the supervisors, as their school district's liaison with the university, had originally identified those candidates who were to be interviewed for these positions, it was the building principal who made the hiring decision. At the end of the year the building principal decided whether to offer the teacher a regular contract.

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[7]See Morris L. Cogan, Clinical Supervision (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973); Noreen B. Garman, "Theories Embedded in the Events of Clinical Supervision: A Hermeneutic Approach," Journal of Curriculum and Supervision 5 (No. 3, Spring 1990): 201-213; and Robert Goldhammer, Clinical Supervision: Special Methods for the Supervision of Teachers (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1969).

FIELD WORK

As Assistant Director for the program, I had established a professional relationship with the three supervisors involved. In an effort to understand what supervisors did when they were "doing supervision," I asked to be allowed to interview them and follow them as they interacted with their teachers. I conducted intensive interviews with these three, centered around their professional life-histories, and accompanied each on at least one classroom visit.

I recorded six supervisory conferences in all, and used five: Two of these were the pre- and post-observation conferences with a middle school teacher (occurring between periods), the other three were post-observation conferences--all with elementary teachers.[8] The conferences lasted from five to twenty-eight minutes. Four of the conferences took place in the teacher's room, and the fifth was held on folding chairs in a storage room.

As stated, I transcribed the conference tapes using a conversation analysis transcript notation protocol.[9] The transcription of these six conferences took nearly seven hundred

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[8]This pre-observation conference was the only one of its kind I witnessed. One of the supervisors, Vern, arranged for me to observe his interactions with two different teachers, on two separate occasions. But because of contingencies, I was left with only two conference transcripts that I used--one for each teacher.

[9]The reader is advised to become familiar with this protocol, as it will make reading the following passages that much easier. Please refer to the Appendix of this paper.

hours.

ANALYSIS

The term "analysis" when applied to a qualitative study is somewhat misleading--implying, among other things, a discrete phase of a research project. I prefer the term "understanding," or the plural, "understandings," which speaks to the holistic, tentative, and on-going process of making sense of what the researcher has seen and heard.[10] Use of this term is less restrictive than "analysis" in that it also allows for other knowledge, such as that gained through subsequent reading, to inform the particular study.

My understanding of supervision and supervisory conferences actually started with my experience as a graduate assistant charged with supervising student teachers. As I reflected upon my own growth in that role, I was inclined to examine my face-to-face interactions with those nascent teachers. Concern for my role and responsibility drew me into classes on clinical supervision with Keith Acheson, co-author of Techniques in the Clinical Supervision of Teachers.[11]

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[10]An excellent case is made for the use of "understanding" as appropriate for qualitative research in Harry F. Wolcott, "On Seeking--and Rejecting--Validity in Qualitative Research," in Qualitative Inquiry in Education: The Continuing Debate, eds. Elliot W. Eisner and Alan Peshkin (New York: Teachers College Press, 1990), p. 146.

[11]Keith A. Acheson and Meredith D. Gall, Techniques in the Clinical Supervision of Teachers: Preservice and Inservice Applications, 2nd ed. (New York: Longman, 1987).

Upon entering the field to conduct this study, I found I had as much "un-learning" to do as I did learning. My teachers, the supervisors mentioned, were gentle and patient, yet insistent that I understand them and their interactive world. Analysis truly began upon entering the field. My understandings were continually checked with my informants and against the wealth of literature I was able to uncover that dealt with both supervision and supervisory conferences.

My understandings have continued to grow and be refined. As an ethnographer, I doubt I will ever get it right. And, as an ethnographer, I doubt that I will ever stop trying. With this qualification, I relate to you, the reader, how I have come to understand those conferences I witnessed.

PROCESSES COMMON TO MOST CONFERENCES

"Unboundedness"

Unlike previous researchers of supervisory conferences, I found the conferences to be "unbounded."[12] By this, I mean that the conferences were found to be related to the context within

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[12]See, for example, Arthur Blumberg, "Supervisor-Teacher Relationships: A Look at the Supervisory Conference," Administrator's Notebook 19 (No. 1, September 1970): 1-4; Arthur Blumberg, Supervisors and Teachers: A Private Cold War, 2nd ed. (Berkeley, CA: McCutchan, 1980); Elizabeth L. Holloway, "Interactional Structure of the Supervisory Interview," Journal of Counseling Psychology 29 (No. 3, 1982): 309-317; George C. Kyte, "The Supervisor-Teacher Conference: A Case Study," Education 92 (November-December 1971): 17-25; and Richard H. Weller, Verbal Communication in Instructional Supervision (New York: Teachers College Press, 1971).

which they occurred.[13] There is ample evidence from both the ethnographic material and the conversation transcripts of the inter-relationship of conference and context.

As stated, every conference but one took place in the teacher's classroom, generally with students present. The one exception was convened in a storage area adjacent to the music room with strains of "My Favorite Things," as practiced by an elementary strings class, wafting in and out of the conference.[14]

The transcripts show repeatedly that participants were aware of the contexts in which they found themselves, often made reference to them, and sometimes even had recourse to employ the contexts in accomplishing their "moves": As an example, the middle school teacher, Kari (T_3), terminated both her pre- and post-observation conferences by addressing her remarks to students in the room. Another supervisor and teacher, Vern and Ed (S_2 and T_2), modulated the volume of their voices when speaking of sensitive matters in their conference, which was held in the front of Ed's fifth-grade classroom as the students did seatwork.

But the most persuasive argument for my position comes from

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[13]This difference may be due to the methods used: One is apt to find what one sets out to look for. As I have said, I attempted to "cast a wide net," and in so doing may be accused of dragging in the flotsam with the fish.

[14]For me it was enough to have to listen to this during the conference itself, it was almost too much to do so throughout the transcription process.

a conference in which the teacher, Bea (T_1), mentioned her class that was outside "with no supervision":

Transcript Fragment #1

((T goes to window))
T_1: =I'm jus- concerned that my kids are out there ((at recess)) with no supervision
S_1: OH:: well you'd better get out there, then.
T_1: no he's still out there - that's good (1.2) >just let me check and make sure< - okay=

At this point in the conference, the teacher got up--actually "leaving" the conference momentarily--to go to the window. This occurrence followed two other "interruptions": an electronic bell (probably ignored on any conscious level), and that of another teacher who stopped by to borrow a stop watch.

Later in the same conference the teacher monitoring Bea's class knocked on the door to confer with her. At this point, Bea again "left" the conference to negotiate another "three or four minutes" with him (actually the conference continued much longer).

It was interesting to me that this teacher never again mentioned her group outside, but the supervisor, Faye (S_1), did. Near the end of this face-to-face encounter, and after she had attempted to take her leave by employing other leave-taking strategies, Faye brought up the group outside (lines 5-6 and 8):

Transcript Fragment #2

S_1: ((to observer)) well Dun can - do you wanna go: - or are you gonna stay. here I am - walkin' outta here and he's stayin' here ((laughs)) and he's - watching me -
T_1: ((to observer)) yeah, thank you ((laughs))
S_1: leave. it's because - I'm thinking you need to be out on that playground.
T_1: I'm going out - I'm gonna take=
S_1: =I SEE YOU looking out there - so - frequently

9 T_1: I'm gonna t-[1]

This shows that the group outside--the larger context--held continuing conversational relevance for the participants throughout the conference. Again, the immediate physical contexts were seen by me as having an influence upon the conferences--though perhaps never as strongly as in the preceding example.

Conference Phases

Another conference characteristic I noticed occur across conferences was what I refer to as "phases."[15] In these conference transcripts I noted three phases: 1) the supervisor's reporting phase; 2) the teacher's response phase; and 3) a programmatic phase. The first phase seemed to belong to the supervisor.

Supervisor's Reporting Phase

The supervisor took the floor to report on what they had observed in the lesson.[16] What is interesting is that this

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[15]I do not mean to imply that these phases are discrete, i.e., with a definite beginning and end. Again, these are my attributions and nomenclature, and, though I feel I can make a strong case for their existence, I cannot say with absolute certainty that the participants were either consciously aware of them and what they were doing at the time or that they would refer to them in my terms.

[16]I believe I can make the case that both supervisor and teacher orient to this as the role and responsibility of the supervisor and as being the primary purpose for a conference. This is why, of all three phases, the supervisor's report phase comes at the beginning of the conference and the teachers take an

reporting, what I call "the other-set-of-eyes function" of the supervisor, was usually done chronologically--beginning with the first bit of data the supervisor had written, and continuing until either the end of the data was reached or other topics were introduced and exhausted.[17] If other topics were introduced, the supervisor often initiated a return to the reporting function at a later time.[18]

Elsewhere, I have termed this portion of the dialogue the "conference proper."[19] By this I mean that the participants seemed to orient to the supervisor report as being the main purpose of the conference. Much of the literature in instructional supervision seems to support this claim.[20]

Strong support for my assertion that the participants were

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acknowledging posture.

[17]Duncan Waite, Behind the Other Set of Eyes: An Ethnographic Study of Instructional Supervision (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, The University of Oregon, 1990), p. 115.

[18]This chronological presentation of the data and the complementary introduction of topics may have ramifications for what gets discussed and who introduces topics, i.e., who "controls" the conference. It just may be the case that, owing to the linear progression of the conference topics, the teacher seldom has an opportunity to introduce topics of her or his concern. One can easily imagine a scenario whereby the conference time runs out before the teacher gets a "free" turn at the floor, i.e., one that isn't a response to supervisor-initiated topics. This chronological discussion of data may, then, be impositional of the teacher's time and may very well limit what gets discussed; it may, in fact, severely limit teacher reflection. These are issues for further study.

[19]Ibid., p. 115.

[20]For example, Madeline Hunter, "Six Types of Supervisory Conferences," Educational Leadership 37 (February 1980): 408-412.

oriented to the opening of the (post-observation) conference as a time for the supervisor's report is given in the conference between Kendra, S_3, and Kari, T_3, where the supervisor opened with (lines 1-2):

Transcript Fragment #3

1 S_3: I just took ˛down ^all kinds of ^stuff ˛here ((excited
2 voice)) (0.3) u:[:m
3 T_3: ok'ay
4 S_3: I first I ˛started doing a little break˛down of ti:me - for
5 ˛you.
6 T_3: °um ^hum°

Note the teacher's assent (lines 3 and 6).

During this portion of the conference, supervisors reported upon classroom occurrences from their point of view, both physical and philosophical. One supervisor, Vern (S_2), saw a gender issue develop. Another, Kendra (S_3), saw a management issue with a boy who was acting out. Faye (S_1) saw the teacher not refocus the group and not clarify the intent of her teacher questions.

As supervisors had the floor for most of this phase, they initiated most of the topics. Some of these topics were only loosely associated with the data: Vern's (S_2's) discussion of the gender issue as it relates to science and math education is an example of this. In the course of the discussion, this supervisor mentioned his trip to Harvard, works by the author Carol Gilligan, cultural constraints and norms against inclusion of girls in science lessons, an anecdote about his former colleague--a woman--who rumpled up and threw away the "consumables" from her science curriculum, and more.

During this phase, the teacher's turns at talk were filled with acknowledgment tokens such as "uh huh," and "um." Teachers seldom interrupted and hardly ever initiated discussion of a new topic during this phase.

Supervisors employed various strategies to retain the floor. Raised voice, increased speed, overlapping, repetition, and elongation of utterances or use of "floor holders" such as "U:::m" were used by supervisors, alone or in combination, to retain the floor during this phase.

Transcript Fragment #4 (example of raised voice in overlap to retain floor, note line 3)

1 S_1: =the - intent of this question - is: (0.8) if: - you wer:e=
2 T_1: =oh, I forgot to take [my ( )
3 S_1: IF - YOU WERE ^TAKING] - °a pen^cil -
4 at the end° see what you're after ^here: - IS: - THEM to
5 th:ink

Some supervisors quickly employed these strategies at the slightest hint that the teacher may have been making a bid for the floor; for instance, when the teacher may have "misplaced" an acknowledgment token in mid-turn instead of at the "appropriate" juncture.

Transcript Fragment #5 (example of increased speed to retain the floor in the first instance, lines 5 and 7; and overlap in the second instance, line 8)

1 S_2: you know - you - did it again< and you got Tim to go back to
2 his DESK. THERE'S A KID WHO WAS BEING RESISTANT but you: -
3 WERE PERSISTENT. - okay? ·h THAT WAS GOOD - you did not
4 choose to ig^nore ^that, because - >you know< sometimes it's
5 easiest to ignore it when they don'[t do it >sometimes
6 T_4: um hum]
7 S_2: they QUIT< (0.5) but they don't- in- - >ya- know< th- he
8 might have quit - misbehaving[·h but he do esn't ignore
9 T_4: um hum]
10 S_2: ^it. ·h and - the moment he ignores one of a com^mand, when
11 you make a com^mand at that - strength and that commitment -
12 ·h other kids are wa:tching.
13 (0.7)

Supervisors worked at retaining control of "their" conference phase. Some needed to work harder than others. I would conjecture that the amount of work needed to be done by supevisors depended in large measure on how much the teacher shared the supervisor's orientation as to their role and function.[21]

The other "phases" seemed to belong to the teacher. In the teacher response phase, the teachers' turns at talk were large and the supervisors usually took the acknowledging posture, punctuating the teachers' turns with "um hum"s, etc.[22] My warrant for assigning "ownership" of the programmatic phase to the teacher is that, though the turns at talk were relatively

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[21]This may explain the contentious nature of the conference between Faye (S_1) and Bea (T_1), why Bea constantly "interrupted" the conference, and why--according to Faye--she was prone to "arguing." This explanation is bolstered by Herbert Blumer's discussion of the importance of gesture for symbolic interactionism. He wrote: "When the gesture has the same meaning for both, the two parties understand each other. . . . [Gesture] signifies what the person to whom it is directed is to do; it signifies what the person who is making the gesture plans to do; and it signifies the joint action that is to arise by the articulation of the acts of both. . . . If there is confusion or misunderstanding along any one of those three lines of meaning, communication is ineffective, interaction is impeded, and the formation of joint action is blocked." Herbert Blumer, "Symbolic Interaction," in Culture and Cognition: Rules, Maps, and Plans, ed. James P. Spradley (San Francisco: Chandler, 1972), p. 73.

[22]Though I have written that this phase belongs to the teacher, one must remember that though the teacher's turn-sizes were relatively unrestricted, the teacher's choice of topic was heavily restricted, i.e., in this phase the teacher responded to those topics previously mentioned by the supervisor and, as a public accusation or libel has much more force than the rebuttal or later apology, the teacher's turns were restricted to responding to teaching behaviors originally identified by the supervisor.

equally distributed in both turn-size and turn-order, it was generally the teacher who initiated the topics.

Questions

An interesting feature of these conferences is the questions. Generally, the conferences begin with a supervisor question.

Questions can perform several tasks but they usually require some response. The question-answer dyad has been labeled "an adjacency pair" by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson.[23] According to these authors a specific "first-pair part" makes relevant a particular "second-pair part" (e.g., a greeting makes a return greeting relevant). Moreover, people orient to the lack of the second-pair part: If a question is asked, the lack of an answer becomes apparent. More complex questions may require an account as a response.

These teachers seemed oriented to providing both an answer in the form of an account to the first supervisor question. Generally, these global accounts were constructed so as to comprise a de-brief of the lesson. These initial supervisor questions are shown here:

Transcript Fragment #6
S_1: ( ) why?

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[23]Harvey Sacks, Emmanuel A. Schegloff and Gail Jefferson, "A Simplest Systematics for the Organization of Turn Taking for Conversation," in Studies in the Organization of Conversational Interaction, ed. Jim Schenkein (New York: Academic Press, 1978), p. 28.

or

Transcript Fragment #7
S_2: (How did you) feel about the various parts of the lesson?

These early questions call for global, not specifically detailed, accounts. This may be why the teacher took only one to three turns at the beginning of a post-observation conference before topic control reverted to the supervisor. The supervisor got the floor back after the teacher responded to the question. The supervisor then may elaborate on the teacher's response; may clarify the question; may call for a further account; or may actually provide candidate, or alternate, and equally acceptable responses before continuing with the supervisor report phase.

SPECIFIC PROCESSES

Mitigation of Criticisms or Suggestions

Supervisors were often found to lessen the force of their criticisms or suggestions. Pajak and Seyfarth wrote of this as "inauthentic supervisory behavior."[24] I do not render such a judgement here. Rather, I simply wish to describe the phenomenon and offer an explanation of how and why this may take place in the face-to-face interactions between supervisor and teacher.

I found that supervisors lessen, or "mitigate," the force of their criticisms or suggestions in at least two distinct ways: a) through the use of "I" statements; and b) through the use of

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[24]Edward Pajak and John T. Seyfarth, "Authentic Supervision Reconciles the Irreconcilables," Educational Leadership 40 (No. 8, May 1983): 20-23.

modal auxiliaries, such as "might." These verbal strategies were often used in combination.

"I" Statements

In this example, the supervisor began her suggestion with "you," then switched to an "I" statement in mid-trun (line 2):

Transcript Fragment #8

1 S_1: ·h and th- - the intent of this ques.tion (0.5) is - to
2 de.al: (0.7) sometimes you th- it helps me to word 'em into
3 another °( ) to question° -

The use of "I" statements may show respect for the professional autonomy of the teacher while allowing her or him to benefit from the classroom experience of the supervisor--if the teacher so chooses. It remains up to the professional judgement of the teacher whether to accept the suggestion. The teacher may conclude that that particular suggestion is not best for this group at this time, or that it does not fit her or his teaching style. In other words, the teacher is left with the option of thinking "yes, you may; but I am not you."

Another possible explanation for these "I" statements is that supervisors may use this strategy to emphasize their solidarity with the teacher. Brown and Gilman have written on "the pronouns of power and solidarity."[25] They wrote that a shift in pronominal usage--for example from the formal V (for usted) of latin-based languages like French, Italian, and Spanish

[25]Roger Brown and Albert Gilman, "The Pronouns of Power and Solidarity," in Language and Social Context, ed. P. Giglioli (Baltimore: Penguin, 1972).

to the informal T (for tu)--signified a shift in the relationship for the speaker. A shift from the formal to the informal would indicate the speaker wished to emphasize the solidarity and de-emphasize any power differential between the speaker and hearer. In adopting the "I" perspective, supervisors, following this line of reasoning, could be making the most radical pronominal shift possible and, in a sense, be taking the teacher's "voice." In effect, the supervisor would be saying, "I'm just like you."

Modal Auxiliaries

Modal auxiliaries (such as "might've," "could've," or "would've") sometimes were employed by supervisors when criticizing or suggesting alternatives to teachers (line 1).

Transcript Fragment #9

1 S_2: you might've wanted to uh- be doing there - is Brent did
2 not give you the correct respons:e - if you recall -
3 he - ·h was c- he gave a con:fused resp ond an-
4 T_2: different response

This supervisor employed this strategy again, a bit later (lines 1 and 4):

Transcript Fragment #10

1 S_2: ·h one of the things you might wanna have done - when
2 you were doing that active participation piece was to
3 have ·h - mo:ved arou:nd - and listened to - what they
4 were talking about ·h 'cause you would've heard it ra:nge
5 everything from these two - over here who didn't know
6 so they were - they were - polite but they were silent
7 - listening to these two over here - he po- he probably
8 knew
9 T_2: uh huh=

This strategy also may allow the teacher some professional autonomy in decision making. Notice the difference in force between two of the possible ways to state the same suggestion or

criticism; between "you should have" and the less forceful "you might have" or "you could have."

As stated, these strategies also were used in combination (lines 3-4, 6, and 8):

Transcript Fragment #11

1 S_2: uh::m, things and I think we practiced this one because
2 one ((chuckle in voice)) of the things ·hh that I was
3 going to ·h mention - in watching that was - wa:s (0.6) I:
4 - might've - because they had been on the carpet before=
5 T_4: =um hum=
6 S_2: =when ·hh I might've - felt a need for physical change. ·h
7 and at - THAT point in time your only option for physical
8 change - would've been to have 'em - re- - go back to their
9 desks, and then ·hh have 'em in their individual seats -
10 while- - you gave instructions. ·hh I think that ·h >you
11 know< it has been - a - um: (0.4) pattern for - Lynne of
12 course and then for you:=
13 T_4: =um hum=

One possible, and functional, explanation for these strategies is found in the work of Brown and Levinson and their discussion of "face threatening acts."[26] Face threatening acts, or FTAs, are speech acts which may entail a loss of face for parties to a conversation, such as a supervisory conference. For the hearer (the teacher in this case), these FTAs can be orders; requests; suggestions; advice; remindings; threats; warnings; dares; expressions of disapproval, contempt or ridicule; complaints and reprimands; accusations; insults; contradictions or disagreements; and/or challenges.

I do not have the time, space, nor inclination to fully discuss this seminal work and its implications, but I will note

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[26]Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson, "Universals in Language Usage: Politeness Phenomena," in Questions and Politeness: Strategies in Social Interaction, ed. Esther N. Goody (London, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 65.

how appropriately it explains much of the supervisory behavior discussed here. In particular, Brown and Levinson portray some strategies of how one might go about performing an FTA. One such strategy, that of performing the FTA with "redressive action" and employing "positive politeness," seems to explain one supervisor's strategy in conference:[27]

Faye (S_1) had commented to me during our debrief that the lesson we had just witnessed was "the poorest role-play of any of them [her teachers']." Still, in conference with the teacher, she said this:

Transcript Fragment #12

1 S_1: But - uh (0.5) it would be g:ood - for her to be able to
2 see ^your:s - because she would say - oh - >I shoulda done
3 that< or - yep - that worked really ^well and it would
4 probab[ly be ^good - for ^you to be able to see ^hers.
5 T_1: ye^ah] °um°
6 S_1: if [IF she's willing to ex^change.
7 T_1: I'D ^LI KE - to do ^that] °yeah° ^o^kay - we
8 can talk about i[t-
9 S_1: AL]RIGHT=

This supervisor had video taped all her teachers' role-play lessons and suggested that this teacher view that of another (lines 3-4). Notice that she implied that the other teacher could learn something from watching the video tape of this lesson (lines 1-3). The supervisor's strategy seemed to be to help this teacher to (possibly) grow through watching the other's video tape. Still, it seemed as though she felt she needed to give attention to her face in making the suggestion. Notice how enthusiastically the teacher latched on to her suggestion (line

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[27]Ibid., pp. 74-75.

7)--it gave her a readily acceptable plan of action, an out.

Conference Strategies of Particular Supervisors

In a comprehensive review of the literature, Patricia Holland discussed the implicit assumptions surrounding supervisory conferences.[28] One aspect of her treatment dealt with the assumptions concerning the role of observational data in conferences. Other assumptions she examined were related to the pre-organization or supervisor preparation for the ensuing conference. The views cited included Hunter's prescription for highly structured conferences based upon the observational records[29] and that of Sergiovanni and Starrat who suggested that the supervisor prepare with tentative objectives and processes "but in a manner that does not program the course of the conference too much."[30] Holland noted that this last view seemed to reflect Morris Cogan's original position that the supervisor should not completely preplan the course of the conference because it could not be predicted what concerns the

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[28]Patricia E. Holland, "Implicit Assumptions about the Supervisory Conference: A Review and Analysis of Literature," Journal of Curriculum and Supervision 4 (No. 4, Summer 1989): 362-379.

[29]Madeline Hunter, "Six Types of Supervisory Conferences," Educational Leadership 37 (February 1980): 408-412.

[30]Thomas J. Sergiovanni and Robert J. Starratt, Supervision: Human Perspectives, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1988), p. 360.

teacher would bring.[31]

It was interesting for me to note, as an ethnographer of supervision, how the "data" were dealt with in the conferences I witnessed. Faye (S_1) entered her conference in a highly structured manner: She employed a checksheet. This was something she thought necessary owing to her perception of the teacher, Bea (T_1), as highly "distractable." Faye's comments to me were:

> . . . usually as soon as I mention a change or a situation, she starts what I call "arguing," where she'll say, "but this is what I thought da-da-da-da-da-da." And by the time she goes through this long explanation of why she did what she did about something . . . that maybe I was thinking of mentioning but not dwelling on . . . we lose the whole intent and purpose. I do best in my conference with her when I have a guide, like a checksheet, because it guides our discussion. Otherwise, time is gone and you haven't gone anyplace with the discussion.

And so she did. Throughout this conference Faye (S_1) worked to keep Bea (T_1) focused through her use of the checksheet as an observation instrument and by continually referring to it in the dialogue.

The other supervisors I observed exhibited other processes. Vern (S_2) talked about his conference strategy with Ed (T_2):

> [The focus] unfolds somewhat naturally. I never had intended in that science class to see the boy/girl thing going on but it gave me a chance to talk about an issue that's very near and dear to my soul and that is girls in terms of science instruction.
>
> In a post-conference I try to talk about just some of what I would call "basic teaching act" things that were

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[31]Morris L. Cogan, Clinical Supervision (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973), p. 197.

> good: His use of some vocabulary words. And Ed's perceptive. Rather than just say, "oh, thank you," he said "but can it be too much, can it be too confusing?" So I used the teaching part: If it's a new concept, then to do that might muddy the waters. It's a bird walk. My goal was not to strategize about the girls today. My goal was two-fold: One, initially I was going to assume when I first picked that up, my mind initially was going "oh, this is how it is and this is how it is unfolding and continue to unfold." Ed, though, called, as I said, about sixty percent girls . . . so at that point I realized that either he was aware--which he says he was--or even if he wasn't aware, when he questions kids he does a good job of breaking it down boy/girl, boy/girl sort of situation or at least try to make it even. And so the fact that he was aware of that even being an issue was good. That took care of one of my concerns. . . . So the second issue was how does he get the girls to be more involved in those sorts of situations and discussions. You know, bringing up Carol Gilligan's work out of Harvard was a way, an intellectual way, of dealing with it. I talked about the cooperative learning things. . . . And [by] my suggesting this one person, he might draw to some of those things eventually. So my goal today was at the awareness level. It wasn't mastery of a new concept, it was awareness level.[32]

However, in Vern's (S_2's) conference with Doug, his other teacher (T_4), he saw the focus as being different:

> What I wanted to talk about with him--I want to use the word more "global," but that's not the word I want. What I wanted to talk to him about were essential classroom management issues and they were seen as much through student- I mean I didn't have to quote lines. He, himself, was aware of how many times he had to say to the students "sit down" and those sorts of things.
>
> The rest of it had to be more through just talking about it. Also with him, I retaught the lesson. I did a "reteach the lesson" and with that--except to generally refer to what he was doing--I don't need to say "Doug, you said that, then you said this." I assume that's in his mind. I didn't do any counting in

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[32]The alert reader will have noticed that Vern had been heavily trained in the Madeline Hunter model of teaching and supervision; hence, such terms as "bird walk," and his explicit attempt to praise Ed for those things he felt he had done well.

> his, you know--one time I did show him the notes. It was because I had drawn a very quick diagram of what the seating arrangement in the class looked like to me.
>
> I took verbatim for the most part, or "modified verbatim" as I call it.
>
> So it was the same style of notes [as Ed's (T_2's) observation] but I guess what I wanted to talk about I didn't feel the need to refer to the notes as much.
>
> Ed [Vern's other teacher] also tends to sit down. I have the sense he likes the notes there and he likes me pointing them out, things out to him. Doug has not given me that sense of need. I think because Doug is more formal by nature. Our conference tends to be more formal--our body language and things, you know. I'm sitting there across from him. Ed, I'm always at the table next to him and we both lean on the table, we both do that. With Doug there tends to be a whole different approach going on. [Ed] was scanning.

For me, another interesting translation from "data" to conference came in the interaction between Kendra (S_2) and Kari (T_2). At one point in the conference Kendra began to list the positive behaviors she thought Kari had displayed in the lesson. She had listed these on her data sheet--a single sheet of "NCR paper" that automatically produces three copies. What was listed there as "appropriate reinforcement given to student responses" became (lines 2-5, 7, and 9):

Transcript Fragment #13

1 S_2: u:m (1.3) °I commented on: u:m (0.3) y- your- re^laxed
2 .man^ner° (0.7) (ap)propriate rein^force.ment - you were
3 giving (0.4) rea:lly appropriate reinforcement to .some >you
4 were saying< that's interes.ting or I hadn't - thought about
5 that before:
6 T_2: °uh huh°
7 S_2: good idea:
8 T_2: °uh hum:°=
9 S_2: =you were doing a lot of .that.=

This change from the written to the verbal comment shows changes

made in response to the interactional demands of the conference. Also, Kendra didn't mention all of the positive points she had on her list at this time: She brought up another nearer the end of the conference. In that instance, the written phrase "good questions" became (lines 1-3):

Transcript Fragment #14

1 S_2: anyways I ^was- I ^was - >^pleased< and ^your - level of
2 - ^ques^tion^ing (0.4) was ^ex^cel^lent - some- ther-'as:
3 there 'as some ^big ^thin^kin' goin' on in ^he[re ^to ^day
4 T_2: um ^hum]

Note, particularly, the supervisor's positive (global) evaluation.

This supervisor departed from her data in other ways, as well (as did Vern in his conferences). Though she had listed the times along one side of her data sheet, she referred to them in vague terms ("about," "there was one point") or in clearly erroneous terms (line 4):

Transcript Fragment #15

1 S_2: and- y- look how ^long the discus^sion ^went- now this is
2 ^my[: ^clock
3 T_2: this is a lo:]ng ti^m[e:
4 S_2: ^nine th]ir^ty no n- I me:an (0.2)
5 they did ^well - cl[ear up to: -
6 T_2: yeah]
7 S_2: ten fif^teen

Kendra (S_2) erroneously mentioned the starting time as "nine thirty" (line 4), when according to the data sheet the discussion began at nine forty-one. Notice how in this transcript fragment Kendra, as supervisor, quickly sought to repair Kari's misunderstanding of her remark (lines 4-5). Apparently Kari took it as an implied criticism and demonstrated her agreement (line 3). Kendra seemed anxious that she not be left with that mistaken

impression.

Only after Kendra had shared her list of positive lesson points with Kari did she turn the floor over to her with a question calling for a global evaluation:

Transcript Fragment #16

1 S_2: ^any^way (0.3) u:h - OVER^ALL DID IT .GO THE WAY YOU
2 WANTED IT ^TO?

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this brief report I have attempted to demonstrate how supervisors conduct themselves in conferences with teachers--what they say and how they say it. This endeavor is an initial attempt to construct a model of supervisors' communicative competence.[33]

It seemed expected, according to the orientations of the participants, that supervisors report on what they saw transpire in the classroom observation. It even seemed appropriate that they offer some evaluation of what they had seen. This reporting appeared to be the ostensible reason for the conference, as it occupied the first of three conference phases.

Though supervisors report and evaluate on the teaching they have seen, it was seen as appropriate that supervisors do so in a

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[33]Dell Hymes, "Introduction," in Functions of Language in the Classroom, eds. Courtney B. Cazden, Vera P. John, and Dell Hymes (New York: Teachers College Press, 1972), p. xxxvi. Communicative competence, as used here, is taken to mean what a supervisor needs to know to behave (communicate) appropriately in a given situation (i.e., a conference), how a supervisor does that, and how a supervisor learns to do so. Such a notion is non-evaluative, not a judgement of good and bad supervisory behavior (Judith L. Green, personal communication).

manner that respected the teacher's "face." Supervisors were shown to do this in at least two ways--through "I" statements, and the use of modal auxiliaries--that tended to mitigate the face threatening potential of suggestions and criticisms.

It seemed within the participants' expectations for supervisory conferences that supervisors question teachers. These questions often called for global evaluations by teachers of the lesson just past, or called for accounts of the teachers' actions.

Supervisor reports were shown to have varying recourse to the "data" provided by whatever observational instrument the supervisor employed. It was generally up to the supervisor to decide what use to make of the data, though this decision may reflect the supervisor's perception of the teacher's needs or expectations. Some supervisors cited the data verbatim, while others radically departed from what they had written. One reason suggested for such departures was that they were the supervisors' responses to the interactional demands of the conference.

Supervisors were shown to generally control the trajectory of the conference. They initiated topics and also sought to retain control of the floor during the supervisor report phase. This control influenced what topics the teachers discussed during the teacher response phase.[34]

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[34]This control, following the definition of communicative competence, is deemed "appropriate." Teachers oriented to it and seldom sought to interrupt the supervisor or initiate new topics during either of the first two phases. In any kind of competition for the floor during the first phase, it was the

Conferences were shown to be embedded within larger contexts. Conference participants were shown to be aware of these contexts and to employ them for interactional work.

This report has shown only one side of the conference, the supervisor's. Much work still needs to be done to understand the interactional nature of supervisory conferences as they develop moment-by-moment. It is felt that further research in the areas of teacher participation in conferences, the role of non-verbal behavior in supervisory conferences, and the cultural factors that influence conferences would contribute to a more complete understanding of how supervision is performed and the meaning it holds for participants.[35]

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teacher who conceded.

[35]Such work is currently underway in the Department of Curriculum and Supervision at The University of Georgia. Interested parties are encouraged to contact Duncan Waite, Assistant Professor, The Department of Curriculum and Supervision, 124 Aderhold Hall, College of Education, The University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia 30602, telephone: (404) 542-4157, bitnet: DWAITE@UGA.

APPENDIX

TRANSCRIPT NOTATION[36]

-	a dash is used to signal a slight pause, generally of less than .2 seconds
(0.0)	parentheses used to show longer pauses, timed in tenths of seconds
^	caret used for rising intonation
.	subscripted caret used to show falling intonation
° °	superscripted os enclose passages which are quieter than the surrounding talk
[ ]	brackets enclose simultaneous talk, marking onset and resolution
_____	words underlined are given stress by the speaker
( )	parentheses used to show transcriber's doubt, or inaudible passages
(( ))	double parentheses are used to note occurrences in the setting which are not part of the talk
> <	arrows are used to show passages spoken at a much quicker rate than surrounding talk
=	latches show where one speaker's turn begins immediately after the preceding speaker's with no pause
:	colons are used to show elongated sounds, generally, each colon represents a beat
CAPS	show talk which is louder than surrounding talk
.h	shows an audible in-breath
h	shows an audible exhalation

[36]This protocol was derived from the work initially done by Gail Jefferson and reported in "Explanation of Transcript Notation," in Studies in the Organization of Conversational Interaction, ed. Jim Schenkein (New York: Academic Press,1978): xi-xvi.